Enough is Enough: the first nine months

Waltham Forest’s gang prevention programme
Enough is Enough: the first nine months

Introduction, by Cllr Chris Robbins, Leader of Waltham Forest Council

Waltham Forest has never been the kind of council to shirk its responsibilities or shy away from admitting that it has a problem.

Despite being classed as an ‘outer London’ borough – and thus receiving less by way of police resources than neighbouring boroughs like Hackney or Newham – the spectre of gang crime has cast the same kind of pall over our neighbourhoods as in the most deprived elsewhere in the UK. In 2007 the borough commissioned ‘Dying To Belong’, a groundbreaking piece of research by gangs expert Professor John Pitts which helped shine a spotlight on the problems faced by Waltham Forest.

While work was already underway, a spate of gang-related violence in the summer of 2010 suggested a change of strategy might be required, and thus the seeds of the borough’s innovative new gangs prevention programme ‘Enough Is Enough’ were sown.

Launched in 2011, Enough Is Enough seeks to address gang culture and its root causes head-on. The project draws from a wide variety of disparate disciplines and recognizes the fact that viable solutions to ingrained societal and economic problems are required rather than headline-grabbing quick fixes. Similarly, the solutions we formulate and the support we offer has to be both practical and lasting: we cannot expect to turn a young person’s life around in two weeks or two months and then simply cut them adrift.

Enough Is Enough, then, seeks to help those who are deeply entrenched in gang culture; those who are most at risk of joining gangs and those who are affected by their family members’ destructive choices. Uniquely, the programme works with the whole family and attempts to address the many different factors that can draw people towards a life of crime.

The borough’s gang problem is not a widespread issue affecting the entire population. As well as working with gang members and their families, the project has the support of the local community and draws heavily from their on-the-ground knowledge and their own desire to make their neighbourhoods better places to live. Beyond these streets or estates, we believe that by strengthening communities and helping residents reclaim their neighbourhoods we can create a place where gangs simply cannot operate.

The final strand of the project is acknowledging the fact that while we can seek to engage with those affected by or involved with gang crime, some will simply not accept our help. We are therefore working closely with our colleagues in the Metropolitan Police Service to crack down on gang activity, share information and encourage residents to report criminality. We have been frank in our admission that gang crime is not a problem that we can enforce our way out of – it is too deep-rooted and complex for that. Our overall message therefore has to be simple: we are here to help, but if you refuse to accept our assistance we will do everything in our power to stop you in your tracks.

Driven by the passion, experience, expertise and intelligence of officers, community champions, local police and public, private and voluntary organisations, Enough Is Enough seeks to drive down crime; empower our communities and spread the message that gang activity cannot and will not be tolerated.

As well as being new to Waltham Forest, we also believe that the Enough Is Enough model is the only project of its type in its focus on individual families and the extent of its community involvement.

Despite its relative infancy, the programme has already chalked up a series of notable successes. However, we know that this is a key time for the project and that it is important that we do not lose momentum or focus.

This booklet aims to outline our programme, highlight its work and explain what still needs to be done.
Enough Is Enough, in a nutshell

Long before widespread civil unrest brought gangs and youth violence to the top of the news agenda, Waltham Forest was working on an innovative strategy to tackle its gang problem.

Despite making £35m worth of cuts this year, the Council has found £1m (£700,000 of which is ‘new’ money) to put towards this work.

Enough Is Enough is a unique multi-agency gang prevention programme that seeks to deliver policies and projects that will:

• Offer individuals and their families a way out of gang life
• Increase the number of violent criminals being brought to justice
• Reduce the fear of crime in local communities
• Increase public confidence in the Council, Police and their partners.

The project has full cross-party political support, involvement from talented community members and high-level buy-in from all public and voluntary sector partners.

“The estimated cumulative saving to the public purse from this is estimated as being roughly £2.3million against the cost per family of around £21,000.”

Money talks

£21k – the cost per-family of the project
£700,000 – the amount of new money the Council has invested in Enough Is Enough
£1m – the Council’s total budget for the project’s first year
£2.3m – the estimated savings to the public purse of the recent decrease in gang-related violence
£35m – the savings Waltham Forest has made since the Comprehensive Spending Review
£65m – the savings Waltham Forest must make in the next four years

By tapping into high-level intelligence from the Met’s ‘Operation Connect’ initiative, the Council has been able to identify an initial cohort of 120 individuals who could most benefit from the programme. This group, comprising gang members, those at-risk and their parents, carers and siblings forms the first wave of the Enough Is Enough project.

Work began in January, with personal visits made to each family explaining the project, what we would offer and how we can help.

While we anticipated an initial rise in gang-related crime given enforcement activities and inner flux within our local gangs we have in fact seen significant reductions in gang-related violence and robbery since the project’s launch.

Waltham Forest Guardian, 25 August 2011

“The initiative, launched in January by Waltham Forest police and the local council, has been hailed as a solution to youth crime by the Government. And it has been singled out for praise by Karyn McCluskey, who heads up the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit. She said Waltham Forest was one of a few boroughs in the country ‘getting it right’ when it came to tackling gang violence.”
What is unique about our approach?

Enough Is Enough draws on knowledge and best practice from a variety of sources, forges unique partnerships between public, private and voluntary sector organizations and aims to offer holistic, tailor-made solutions to those at risk while empowering local communities.

The Family Partnership Team

First and foremost, our gangs prevention programme recognizes the fact that young people can be drawn into gang lifestyles via different routes and for many different reasons. As such, any ‘one size fits all’ response to the problem would quickly flounder, and a careful, tailor-made solution to a family’s individual needs is necessary.

To this end, Waltham Forest has brought together a range of experts hailing from a wide array of different backgrounds and professions encompassing social work, housing, substance abuse, education and unemployment.

This multidisciplinary Family Partnership Team are currently working with 26 high-risk gang members and their families. A further seven older gang members are being worked with via our ‘Priority Offender’ scheme.

Beyond the Family Partnership Team itself, tackling gang crime is Council-wide priority, with buy-in from managers and staff from the chief executive and council leader down.

Community insight

While professional expertise is naturally a key driver for the programme, the Council also recognizes the invaluable insight and support of local residents for whom gang activity represents a considerable presence. The borough is fortunate enough to be home to several active, interested and passionate individuals whose aims and aspirations mirror our own and who we are working alongside to achieve shared aims.

Named the ‘A Better Way Partnership’, the group currently comprises 25 members from a unique range of backgrounds and professional disciplines. The Partnership exists to ensure the successful deployment of the borough’s gang prevention programme by ensuring the programme is comprehensive and continues to reflect community needs and sensitivities. The A Better Way Partnership delivers innovative projects into high-risk communities in order to create opportunity and encourage youngsters toward positive outcomes.

Innovative partnerships

As well as working with communities and its hardworking colleagues in the local police, the Council recognizes the advice, support and assistance partner organisations can offer. As such, strong bonds and working relationships have been or are being forged with:

- Local schools and colleges
- Local housing providers
- Youth organizations and charities
- NHS partners
- Churches, Mosques and faith groups
- Victim Support
- The London Ambulance Service

Funding and investment

In these straitened times, funding is an ever more pressing issue. The Council is aiming to save £65m over the next four years and has been frank with its residents in stating no council service will go untouched as these savings are found.

Despite ambitious savings targets - £35m of which have already been made – the Council has invested £1m in the programme and pledged to maintain Enough Is Enough for the next three years at least.

Despite some disappointing setbacks (e.g. failure to secure any Olympic additionality funding and an unsuccessful innovation funding bid to the DWP) the Council has secured £70,000 from the GLA and some £200,000 in funding from the EU to support the HEART project, an innovative scheme which aims to reduce the risk of young women committing or being subjected to serious violence. This project recognizes women’s role as influencers and confidantes as well as the potential victims of horrific gang-related violence and abuse themselves.

Vital funding streams

Re-writing the rulebook when it comes to tackling gangs isn’t easy or cheap, so Waltham Forest is committed to investigating all possible funding sources. These include:

- £200,000 from the EU to fund the innovative HEART project
- Council support to 10 third sector organisations in bids totaling £140,000 to deliver diversionary activity
- £70,000 from the GLA to undertake multi-systemic therapy
- £50,000 from the Metropolitan Police Authority for youth intervention and third sector community projects
- A pending bid to Comic Relief for £60,000
Progress and positive steps
Progress of the Family Partnership Team

Members of the Family Partnership Team work with whole to reduce gang involvement, tapping into family members’ own influencing skills and – where need be – helping them to overcome problems so they can properly support their children.

So far 33 families have been identified and all about six have positively engaged with us. Achievements include:

- Helping NEET (not in education, employment or training) young people back into education, training or employment.
- Working with parents and carers to address the cycle of worklessness.
- Working with siblings to address the impact of gang affiliation and reduce further gang involvement.
- Relocating families who need to physically leave their neighbourhoods to escape gang culture.

Case Studies

Case study A
Young Person A had been a gang member for several years, a problem exacerbated by poor school attendance. Young Person A had significant contact with the criminal justice system for gang related offences and had also been a victim of serious reprisal attacks by rival gangs.

The Family Partnership Team contacted the family, outlined the support available and helped highlight the consequences of A's continued involvement in gang activity.

Since engaging with the Family Partnership Team, A has commenced training and recognised the impact that his gang activity has on his family. The Family Partnership Team has also supported A's family, helping them relocate and access employment/training opportunities.

Case Study B
Young Person B was formerly a gang member in Hackney. He has a history of substance misuse and offending. After moving to Waltham Forest the team introduced B to a charity where he has since received structured training and voluntary work experience.

He is also a volunteer in the Mayor of London’s mentoring scheme.

Case Study C
Young Person C contacted the ‘Going The Distance’ programme of his own volition. He was concerned that his gang affiliation was affecting his parents and his younger sibling. The team set up a bespoke work plan with the Family Partnership Team EAM, and reviewed his housing and college courses to enable him to begin studying a foundation university degree.

Case Study D
Young Person D was introduced to the programme by a member of the community who has provided ongoing support. As a result of his involvement with Enough Is Enough, D has started an ICT college course.

Case Study E
Young Person E was introduced to the programme by his brother, a gang member. He has since secured a place at college pending receipt of his qualifications and is now actively seeking part-time work to help fund his studies.
The community partnership

Since the launch of the programme, the A Better Way Partnership has gone from strength to strength. It now features 25 dedicated members who comprise private sector success stories; public sector experts and trusted community figures whose grassroots activity has made them trusted figures to some of the borough’s most disenfranchised young people.

The Partnership aims to help and assist the Council and its partners, but it is clear that its role must also be that of critical friend where necessary, unafraid to question and provide constructive critique.

The role of the A Better Way Partnership was highlighted during the unrest of August spilled from neighbouring Tottenham into our own borough. While other parts of London witnessed fires, violence, and running battles with police, Waltham Forest escaped relatively unscathed. Though more than 70 businesses suffered we firmly believe that without the links forged by the A Better Way Partnership the story would have been very different.

The fluid flow of reliable information between the Council, police and trusted community figures allowed us to stay ahead of the curve and quickly mobilise our resources and responses. On the ground, too, these contacts proved vital. They responded to local unrest by reassuring their communities and helping diffuse neighbourhood tensions. Again, the borough was not immune to the disorder, but we feel very strongly that without this support network the damage to property and community confidence would have been far, far worse.

Notes the Chair of the A Better Way Partnership:

“Waltham Forest is a unique borough and there are many reasons for us to feel proud of where we live.

“However, we also need to address some key issues that, if left unchecked, will increase risk, deter opportunity and escalate tensions. With the support of the Council, the MPS and other bodies much work has and is being done to build safer neighbourhoods. However, it is deep within those troubled communities where opportunity needs to be delivered; our young residents need real alternatives to the gang lifestyles that constantly put them and their families at risk. It is here that the A Better Way Partnership is tightly aligned with hard-to-reach individuals and families. As a community group of Waltham Forest residents, each possessing the emotional understanding and professional ability to make a difference, we advise and guide all stakeholders from a position of experience, not just from study.

“As evidenced during the recent riots, we operate swiftly in response to sudden incidents, but also proactively to assist in prevention. The gang prevention programme is central to achieving a safer borough and our role is to ensure the plan is both acceptable and workable.

“The members cherish the credibility and trust they have and continue to build within our communities as we seek to develop and implement innovative projects and subsequently secure investment in Waltham Forest. Indeed, the successful future of our borough rests on the belief residents have in those charged with responding to community needs, but this will only occur if they can see local, tangible changes. The Partnership exists to identify, support and facilitate those changes; initiatives that will open doors of opportunity, help repair fractured relationships with authoritative bodies, motivate our youth to reveal and apply their talents and themselves become positive role-models. Reducing serious youth crime in Waltham Forest is a formidable challenge, but as we listen to the victims and encourage the input of our young people and their communities, the A Better Way Partnership board will engage with all stakeholders and always be at the centre of the challenge ahead.”
Early years involvement
As well as helping those who have been involved in gangs or are on the cusp of becoming involved, a key aim of the project is to protect younger family members and prevent them making the same destructive lifestyle choices as their siblings. To this end we have:

• Worked extensively with local schools, introducing the ‘Stolen Lives’ and ‘Big Question’ primary resources to help with the issue of gangs.
• Created a self-assessment risk management tool for schools and youth organisations in relation to health and safety, anti-social behaviour and serious youth violence. This is being examined as a model of good practice by the GLA and the Youth Justice Board.
• Designated a Victims Champion from Victim Support whose role includes a heavy focus on young people affected by gang violence.
• Secured funding for the HEART project to help protect young women from gang violence and reduce the risk of them becoming gang members themselves.
• Brought in an early intervention advocacy worker to work with the Family Partnership Team in engaging younger siblings who are at risk of gang involvement

Real enforcement
While we will do everything we can to engage with gang members and steer them away from harmful, destructive behaviour, we also realise that some individuals will simply refuse our help. Enforcement, therefore, is a constant theme and while this is naturally remit of our partners in the local police the Council has, in turn, worked with housing associations and drug agencies to support these sensitive operations.

Since the launch of Enough Is Enough in January, Metropolitan Police Service operations since have resulted in:

• An accurate list of known gang members
• 60 search warrants on homes and other private premises
• 80 gang-related arrests
• The recovery of nearly 100 firearms, knives and other dangerous weapons
• Convictions for offences that include gunpoint robberies; grievous bodily harm and a variety of drug-related offences

Since the launch of the programme and the hand-in-hand work of our police colleagues, the borough has witnessed significant decreases in gang-related violence including gun crime, knife crime and robbery. While we would be hesitant in suggesting these figures are wholly as a result of the borough’s gang prevention programme we nevertheless believe them to be grounds for cautious optimism.

While many of the affects of gang crime are hard to put a price on (e.g. fear among residents; lack of inward investment; a transient population) some, such as costs to businesses, housing providers and the NHS are more quantifiable. Waltham Forest estimates that this reduction in gang activity has saved the taxpayer approximately £2.3million.

Gang crime stats
Waltham Forest has witnessed a significant reduction in gang crime as compared to the same six-month period (January-June) last year:

• Serious youth violence is down by 24%
• Gun crime down by 31%
• Knife crime down by 16%
• Personal robbery down by 11%.

This represents a saving to the taxpayer of £2.3million.
Next steps

On 30 September the Council hosted an event which brought together all those involved in delivering the Enough Is Enough programme. It represented a time to reflect, report back, share best practise and highlight areas where work yet needs to be done. Several cross-discipline workshop sessions were held, and the feedback from these is currently being analysed.

While this cycle of report, critique and self-relection will continue with another event to be held in March, the Council and its partners are already working towards a range of core aims and achievements beyond seeing through the work they are already committed to. These include:

- Appointing a professional evaluation partner for the programme.
- Undertaking community mediation and conflict resolution work to assist with capacity building in troubled communities.
- Implementation of multi-systemic therapy to provide intense family intervention where mental health issues are present.
- Working with the NHS on trauma education with young people, parents and frontline workers.
- Developing a good practice toolkit to assist other local authorities while seeking good practice to enhance the Enough Is Enough programme.
- Developing a specific programme based in Accident & Emergency with the Salvation Army to identify client referrals.
- Developing a dedicated business project to teach young people how to set up their own business and provide business mentoring, work placements, job shadowing and investment opportunities.

Conclusion

In just nine months the Enough Is Enough programme has made significant progress thanks to dedicated, expert staff and tenacious community volunteers who are driven to make a positive difference to their home borough. In just nine months the impact has been felt, with young lives changed and an apparent drop in gang-related crime across the borough.

Despite these strides, however, there is still much to be accomplished. Funding remains a pressing problem, and while the Council has guaranteed £1m until April 2012, future funding opportunities are, at present, uncertain.

Ultimately, gang crime cannot be ‘enforced away’ and Waltham Forest has made a clear commitment to tackling the problem head-on. Simply put, we cannot and will not wait for ‘better’ economic times to push this initiative forward.

The problems we now face have not arisen overnight. They come as a result of poverty, inequality, disenfranchisement and a dearth of aspiration that has blighted more than just one generation.

In much the same way that these problems have been slow to boil, so they cannot be solved quickly or painlessly. Waltham Forest has made clear from the outset that this is a long-term commitment, and we ask that our partners locally and nationally stand shoulder to shoulder with us as we enact plans for the long journey ahead.

Evening Standard, 31 August 2011

“...joint Council and police scheme is being run in Waltham Forest to target 100 of the borough’s most dangerous gang members. The project has identified 28 Waltham Forest families with children who are in gangs and who they believe are in need of extra support.”